

March 10, 2009

GRAYMONT WESTERN U. S., INC. MINE EXPANSION EIS

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

Graymont Western U.S. Inc (Graymont) proposes to expand its open pit limestone quarry to develop additional limestone reserves. This expansion would extend the life-of-mine for about 50 years.

ISSUES:

Graymont has operated a limestone quarry and plant in the Limestone Hills since 1982. Graymont mines high grade limestone from the Mission Canyon Formation of the Mississippian Madison Group. The Mission Canyon Formation forms the highest ridge of the northeast trending Limestone Hills, a small range of Paleozoic rocks located on the southeastern flank of the Elkhorn Mountain Range.

Graymont has submitted a proposal to expand limestone mining operations at its Indian Creek Mine and Plant located approximately four miles west of Townsend. The mine expansion would include portions of T. 7 N. R. 1 E. and T 6 N., R. 1 E. The proposed expansion would be a continuation to the south of Graymont's existing permitted operations in the Limestone Hills. The mine expansion would include about 1,300 acres as quarry areas, topsoil salvage areas, haul roads and waste rock placement areas, and concurrent reclamation. All disturbance would be reclaimed. Proposed mining operations would last for approximately 50 years.

A draft environmental impact statement was completed in December 2008 and analyzed potential impacts to the Montana National Guard's Limestone Hills Training Range which includes portions of the mine expansion area. The draft EIS analyzed impacts to geology and minerals; cultural and Native American religious concerns; air quality; paleontology; lands and realty; wildlife, fisheries and aquatic resources; range management; vegetation; soils; visual resources; recreation and wilderness; weeds; social and economic values; environmental justice; and threatened, endangered, candidate, and sensitive resources. Cumulative impacts were also addressed. The most significant environmental impact is the disturbance of 450 acres of mountain mahogany, an important browse species for wintering mule deer. The preferred alternative (Modified Pit Backfill) was added to enhance reclamation for the benefit of mule deer and bighorn sheep.

The consequence of an extended delay in permitting would likely mean an interruption in the supply of ore to the mill and possible short-term layoffs.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

The BLM and Montana DEQ have prepared a draft EIS to cover the proposed expansion. The draft EIS was released in December 2008 and identified the Modified Pit Backfill as the preferred alternative. The agencies are now evaluating comments received in response to the draft.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

Public interest in the mine is moderate. The most significant environmental impact is the disturbance of 450 acres of mountain mahogany, an important browse species for wintering mule deer. The preferred alternative (Modified Pit Backfill) was added to enhance reclamation for the benefit of mule deer and bighorn sheep.

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